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ABSTRACT

Two of the four Santa Monica Children's Centers are nursery schools for children aged 3 to 5; the other two centers serve as extended care facilities for children of school age. All centers are concerned with meeting the physical, intellectual, and emotional needs of children on a long-term basis and stress a program offering a variety of play experiences. Staff members work with student assistants from junior high, city college, and the Neighborhood Youth Corps. This affiliation lightens the teachers' work load and benefits the students by giving them valuable experience in child care. Parents participate in communication and fund raising activities at both state and local levels. Local school districts and the state government also cooperate to help assure quality day care at a price working parents can afford. Sources of more detailed information are provided for this program, specifically, and for Model Programs Childhood Education, in general. (Author/WY)

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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Model Programs

Childhood Education

Santa Monica Children's Centers

Santa Monica, California

Low-cost day care facilities for children of working mothers made available through the cooperation of the California State government and local school district

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE
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OE-20135

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FOREWORD

This booklet is one of 34 in a series of promising programs on childhood education prepared for the White House Conference on Children, December 1970. The series was written under contract by the American Institutes for Research for the Office of Economic Opportunity, and the Office of Child Development and the Office of Education, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

Within the broad area of childhood education the series includes descriptions of programs on reading and language development, the disadvantaged, preschool education, and special education. In describing a program, each booklet provides details about the purpose; the children reached; specific materials, facilities, and staff involved; and other special features such as community services, parental involvement, and finances. Sources of further information on the programs are also provided.

The four children's centers in Santa Monica are among the 310 State-supported but locally administered centers throughout California. In Santa Monica the State and the local school district cooperate to provide quality day care facilities at low cost to working mothers and other needy families. The services of the centers are available first to those who have the greatest need, with special preference given to children of one-parent families--over 96 percent of the children at the Santa Monica Children's Centers falling in this category. Typically the parent is a woman without a husband who must support herself and her children. Because their mothers are working, the children have fewer hours of attention and care from their parents than most children do, and many spend more of their waking hours with their teachers than with their parents at home. For these children, aged 3 to 12, dedicated staff members at the Santa Monica centers provide affectionate care and learning activities which foster their growth and development.

STATE FUNDED, LOCALLY ADMINISTERED

The Santa Monica Children's Centers, established in 1943, are part of the California Child Care Centers Program. During World War II Federal funding supported this program, which offered day

care centers for women working in defense industries. Federal support ended in 1946, but as a result of the work of concerned parents and other interested persons the program continued under State funding. In 1969 there were approximately 20,000 children in these children's centers throughout California.

Although the State provides financial support, school districts operate the centers. The school districts were selected to run the centers since they already have administrative facilities, qualified personnel who can assist in organizing the centers, and in many instances suitable buildings and playground space.

Support for the children's centers in the Santa Monica community is strong. The school district, besides assuming administrative responsibility for the centers and providing classrooms and playground space, has levied a special tax to provide supplemental support for the centers in addition to State funds. The centers for school-age children coordinate their programs with the elementary schools and share some facilities and services, such as the school nurse. Many older students in the community have been involved with the centers through junior high or college course work on child development.

Mrs. Docia Zavitovsky, director of the Santa Monica Children's Centers, attributes the long continuation and broad educational involvement of the program to community support, saying, "The people of Santa Monica see a unity in their school system, from the day care centers to the junior college. The support of the community and school administrators has been crucial in the continuation of the centers."

Santa Monica is not an industrial area, and many of the citizens commute to work in or around nearby Los Angeles. Although it is generally a middle-class suburb with many retired residents, there are several poverty areas. At the centers, about one-fourth of the children are members of minority groups. Almost all the children come from families in which the parents are divorced or separated and the mother is supporting her family by working as a secretary, sales clerk, or factory worker.

There are four children's centers in Santa Monica, all located on or near public school grounds. They serve a total of 220 children. Two of the centers are nursery schools for children aged 3 to 5; the other two centers serve children of school age.

Planned for the convenience of the working parent, the hours of the centers are from 7 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., 5 days a week, 12 months a year. The centers are closed for only six holidays during the entire year.

CENTERS SERVE CHILDREN'S NEEDS

Because the employment of the mothers makes it necessary for many children to be cared for from 8 to 10 hours a day and because many children are enrolled in day care centers for a period of several years, the centers have responsibility for a large portion of the children's lives during crucial, formative years of development. Recognizing this responsibility, the Santa Monica centers have developed a program emphasizing healthy growth of the child, physically, intellectually, and emotionally.

The centers meet the physical needs of the children through a well-balanced nutritional program of lunch and snacks, periods of rest, and health care by a registered nurse. The centers are not able to care for sick children, however, and parents must make other arrangements for the care of their children when they are ill.

The centers are also concerned with the intellectual and emotional development of each child. Although the children are not systematically taught specific concepts or skills in language arts or mathematics, they are given opportunities to learn through a variety of play experiences. The programs at the centers are based upon the individual needs of each child, and the staff works with parents to provide the child with beneficial experiences. Special emphasis is placed on providing affection and understanding through adult guidance.

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PRESCHOOL CHILDREN GROW THROUGH PLAY

Each of the two nursery schools has an enrollment of 37 children. The nurseries are staffed by five teachers (one of whom is the head), a cook, a housekeeper, and a part-time nurse. The average teacher-child ratio of 1 to 7 ensures individualized attention. In the classrooms are interest centers including a household center; an area for building with blocks; a science display with plants, small pets, and an aquarium; a book corner; an art center; and an area with toys and games placed on low shelves within easy reach of the children. Playground equipment is especially important because Santa Monica's mild climate enables the children to spend much of their time playing outdoors. The play areas have apparatus for climbing up, around and

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through; a playhouse; a sandbox; open grassy areas; water boxes; and a menagerie of animals, including a rabbit, chicken, and billy goat. The rooms and playground are arranged so that the children can be divided into groups according to age and can play with other children at a similar stage of growth. The youngest children are placed in the smallest groups to provide them with the adult assistance and attention they require. Each group is assigned a specific teacher, allowing the child to develop a consistent relationship with one adult.

When a child first enrolls at the nursery, his parent stays with him for the first two mornings as he gradually becomes accustomed to a new environment, new people, and a new routine. As parents drop their children off at the center on their way to work, the day begins with a period of informal play. From 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. the children engage in a variety of play experiences planned to provide opportunities to explore, learn, work out relationships with others, and develop motor skills.

PERSONALIZED PLANNING FOR SMALL GROUPS

The teachers plan activities for the children in their groups--language experiences in which the teacher tells a story, reads a book, or leads the children in a conversation; dramatic play in

which children can act out parts; opportunities for creative expression with art materials such as clay and paint; playtimes with toys and games; musical activities that include singing and listening to records; and science experiences with plants, animals, and simple materials such as food.

The teacher of each group is also responsible for one area of the play yard and arranges the equipment to suit the abilities and interests of the children in her group. One teacher might arrange large boxes joined by a wooden plank with an old mattress underneath to develop skills in climbing and balancing; another might set up a water table with soap suds where children can pour water in and out of different size containers; another might provide her group with paint brushes and buckets of water to "paint" the fence. Teachers are encouraged to use imagination in their planning and to select fun activities which will meet the needs of the children. Toward the end of the day as the children wait for their parents, they are engaged in quiet activities such as reading stories.

TWO CENTERS FOR EXTENDED DAY CARE

In response to the special problems of working parents with older children, the other two Santa Monica Children's Centers provide extended care for school-age children before and after school and during vacations. These centers are staffed by a head teacher and an additional three to five teachers who work full or part time, depending upon the needs of the program. The average teacher-child ratio is 1 to 14. The centers are conveniently located near the elementary schools where the students spend most of the day. Generally the parents leave their children at the centers in the morning; the children walk to their elementary school where they attend classes and have lunch. They return to the center after school, have a snack, and stay until their parents pick them up. The centers are experimenting with a new program in which kindergarten classes are held within the centers. Kindergarten-age children spend a certain amount of each day with a certified elementary school teacher in classroom activities and do not have to leave the center to attend school.

The activities planned at the centers for school-age children are designed for their particular interests and requirements. Playground and sporting equipment is available for outdoor play and for indoor activities, books, games, manipulative materials,

and other equipment. There is a study area where children can do their homework. They can also participate in clubs such as Cub Scouts and Camp Fire Girls. During the summer the children make trips to nearby parks and libraries, take swimming lessons, engage in other activities through the city recreation department, and take occasional field trips. As the children grow and become more mature, they are allowed increased freedom and given additional responsibilites for cleaning up and assisting with meals. Although the center accepts children up to the age of 12, parents of children over age 10 are encouraged to make other arrangements for their care which will allow the child more independence.

STUDENT ASSISTANTS

In addition to providing much-needed day care services, the children's centers give junior high, city college, and other students an opportunity to learn about young children by serving as student assistants. Because the first concern of the centers is the well-being of the children, student assistants are required to commit themselves to help at the nursery school on a regular basis for a fairly long period of time in order that the children can learn to trust them. Students are carefully scheduled so that they come on a regular basis to help at the

busiest parts of the day and so that each teacher has only one assistant at a time. Extensive participation of students in the centers means that teachers have a lighter load, children develop trusting relationships with a variety of adults, and students gain valuable experience for a career in working with children or for their own family life.

JUNIOR HIGH GIRLS CARE FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

Both nursery schools are located near junior high schools--one across the street and the other actually adjoining the home economics classroom. Eighth-grade girls observe the children in the nursery through windows as part of a home economics unit on child development. Ninth-grade girls can elect to take a course that includes work with the children in the nursery and supervision by one of the nursery school teachers. For one semester the students spend a period each day assisting a teacher in the nursery. The teachers work closely with their assigned student assistants, explaining the procedures in the nursery and giving the students more responsibility as they gain experience in working with young children. The teachers try to make the students feel part of the staff, and they value the contributions the girls make to the nursery. The girls also have

group meetings to discuss their experiences in the nursery, and they receive a grade for their semester's work.

In addition, one class of ninth-grade girls is enrolled in a year-long nursery training class which is combined with instruction in English, taking the place of their regular English class. The class meets for two periods each day, and the girls practice their skills in reading, writing, and discussion using material on child development. The girls take turns helping in the nursery school, each girl assisting a teacher in the nursery for 3 weeks per semester. The girls first observe the children at play and learn about the principles of child development and the reasons for the procedures used in the nursery. Each girl observes one particular child in the nursery and develops a case study book about the child based on her observations. Every Friday the girls share their experiences in the nursery and discuss what contributes to success and what creates problems in dealing with young children. Later in the year the girls are responsible for activities such as presenting a music activity to a small group of students, selecting and arranging materials for a creative art project, planning and preparing a meal for the children, or arranging a special event such as a picnic or field trip. Many of these girls are unmotivated in their academic coursework, but

most of them enjoy caring for the children in the nursery. Often, assuming an adult role in relation to the children increases their feelings of self-confidence.

COLLEGE AND YOUTH CORPS INVOLVEMENT

The director of the centers spends about 20 percent of her time teaching at Santa Monica City College. The students who enroll in her psychology course in child development spend 2 hours per week at the centers for 11 weeks. They are scheduled to come to the centers at times that will not overlap with the scheduled visits of the junior high students. Many of these City College students are young men, whose participation is important to the children since frequently they come from fatherless homes.

Neighborhood Youth Corps students also work at the centers. Some of these students have become interested in a career of working with young children as a result of their experiences in the centers and have been motivated to return to school to continue their education.

Another group of students at the centers is composed of interns working towards an Associate in Arts (A.A.) degree in early childhood education in order to qualify as nursery school teachers. These students assist a regular teacher and over the course of the term gradually assume more responsibilities for planning and carrying out a variety of activities. For example, the intern might bring a certain fruit or vegetable to the center and encourage the children to examine it and make discoveries about the smoothness or roughness of skin texture, the shape, color, taste, and smell; she might encourage the children to take a closer look at the school pets, and to compare their mouths, feet, ears, and outer covering; or she might plan a simple cooking activity such as making jello. The intern and the directing teacher cooperate in planning activities and have conferences in which they discuss the intern's questions.

LINES OF COMMUNICATION

The channels of communication within each center and among all of the centers are kept open through a series of regularly scheduled meetings. Each center holds a weekly staff meeting, and each month the head teachers from the four centers meet together with the director. Four times a year a meeting is held

for all the staff at the four centers, and twice a year the director conducts an inservice training meeting for all staff members plus other interested people in the community, such as public elementary school teachers. New staff members have special orientation meetings to acquaint them with the policies and procedures at the centers. All of these meetings keep the staff informed on the activities of the different centers and provide a forum for the exchange of ideas.

The centers also attempt to maintain communication with the parents in order to provide continuity between the child's life at home and his life at school. There are daily informal contacts with teachers as the parents drop off their children in the morning and pick them up in the afternoon. Parents are asked to tell the staff about any upsets in their child's life such as variation in appetite or special irritability. Periodic conferences between the parents and the teachers, director, or nurse are strongly recommended to allow discussion of the needs of each child and any problems that the child might have either at home or at school. Occasional evening meetings, pot-luck suppers, and coffee hours are held in the nursery schools for the parents and the staff. For most parents, attending the

evening meetings means that they must pay a sitter to stay with their children and only about one-third of them come regularly. Many more parents come to the afternoon and evening meetings when they can bring their children along.

Many of the parents belong to the California Parents Association for Children's Centers whose purpose is to assure the continuation of the State Children's Centers program, to help local centers improve their programs, and to foster close teacher-child-parent relationships. Each year the parents of children at the Santa Monica centers raise the money to send about 12 parents to the State conference of this association.

SUPPORT FOR THE CENTERS

Centers in California are supported by State funds and parents' fees, supplemented in some districts by a local tax. The State contributes an average of 52 cents per hour per child, or three-fourths of the costs of the program; parent fees cover the remaining one-fourth of the costs. The fees for each child are determined by a sliding scale based on income and number of children in the family, generally ranging from 5 to 56 cents per hour with an average of 16 cents per hour per child. The program

is costly, but the cost is justified on the basis that the availability of child care centers enable many families to be self-supporting who would otherwise have to depend on more costly forms of public assistance.

The Santa Monica centers' staff feels that there is a growing need for their services. More mothers are employed full time than ever before. Many of them must work to support a family and cannot afford to spend much for the care of their children while they are away. Part-time nursery schools and parent-cooperative nursery schools do not fill the needs of these parents. The waiting period for a child to be admitted to the Santa Monica centers generally ranges from 3 weeks to 6 months. More low-cost child care centers that working parents can afford are needed. The philosophy of the California centers, however, is that low cost must not be equated with poor quality. Parents should feel assured that their children can spend the day in a cheerful environment which provides opportunities for growth under the supervision of trained personnel. Cooperation between local school districts and the State government is one way of providing quality day care at a price working parents can afford.

Additional information on the centers may be obtained from:

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Mrs. Docia Zavitovsky, Director
Lincoln Child Development Center
1532 California Avenue
Santa Monica, California 90403

or

California State Department of Education
721 Capitol Mall
Sacramento, California 95814

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MODEL PROGRAMS--Childhood Education

This is one in a series of 34 descriptive booklets on childhood education programs prepared for the White House Conference on Children, December 1970. Following is a list of the programs and their locations:

The Day Nursery Assn. of Cleveland, Ohio
Neighborhood House Child Care Services, Seattle, Wash.
Behavior Analysis Model of a Follow Through Program, Oraibi, Ariz.
Cross-Cultural Family Center, San Francisco, Calif.
NRO Migrant Child Development Center, Pasco, Wash.
Bilingual Early Childhood Program, San Antonio, Tex.
Santa Monica Children's Centers, Calif.
Exemplary Center for Reading Instruction, Salt Lake City, Utah
Dubnoff School for Educational Therapy, North Hollywood, Calif.
Demonstration Nursery Center for Infants and Toddlers, Greensboro, N.C.
Responsive Environment Model of a Follow Through Program, Goldsboro, N.C.
Center for Early Development and Education, Little Rock, Ark.
DOVACK, Monticello, Fla.
Perceptual Development Center Program, Natchez, Miss.
Appalachia Preschool Education Program, Charleston, W. Va.
Foster Grandparent Program, Nashville, Tenn.
Hartford Early Childhood Program, Conn.
Philadelphia Teacher Center, Pa.
Cognitively Oriented Curriculum, Ypsilanti, Mich.
Mothers' Training Program, Urbana, Ill.
The Micro-Social Preschool Learning System, Vineland, N.J.
Project PLAN, Parkersburg, W. Va.
Interdependent Learner Model of a Follow Through Program, New York, N.Y.
San Jose Police Youth Protection Unit, Calif.
Model Observation Kindergarten, Amherst, Mass.
Boston Public Schools Learning Laboratories, Mass.
Martin Luther King Family Center, Chicago, Ill.
Behavior Principles Structural Model of a Follow Through Program, Dayton, Ohio
University of Hawaii Preschool Language Curriculum, Honolulu, Hawaii
Springfield Avenue Community School, Newark, N.J.
Corrective Reading Program, Wichita, Kans.
New Schools Exchange, Santa Barbara, Calif.
Tacoma Public Schools Early Childhood Program, Wash.
Community Cooperative Nursery School, Menlo Park, Calif.